Introduction

This is a study of the falling standard of living of a Burmese family who were uprooted by the insurrection from their village home of Pathwe in 1949 and transplanted in a refugee camp in Rangoon. The family consisted of U Myaing - a fisherman aged 47; his wife Ma Aye Myaing, age 33, Daw Aw Zar, his mother, age 72, and four daughters - Ma Tin Shwe, age 14, Ma Khin Myein, age 11, Ma Khai Saw, age 7, and Ma Win Tin, age 5.(1951).

An attempt is made to present quantitatively and qualitatively the items used in, and activities of everyday life in the home village as contrasted with the refugee camp. It is hoped this dynamic situation will reveal some of the basic facts of Burmese culture as they pertain to an average family. The bulk of the data was collected under my direction by Ko Sein Tu, Tutor of the Psychology Department, University of Rangoon, from August 1950 to May 1951. Ko Mya Tu, medical student at the University, helped in collecting the health data. Ma Khin Mamay, Assistant in Anthropology at the University, collected some of the more personal data from the ladies of the family. Professor Mohinda Nath, Head of the Department of Biology, University of Rangoon, kindly arranged for the scientific identification of the food items. Part of the data was collectedby the use of a tape recorder portions of which are reproduced verbation in this report. Miss Mary Watson, Head Stenographer of the Community Project, gave her valuable help in proof reading and typing the stencils for this report.

A setting for the better understanding of the facts of the family is given in sections on general Burmese Concepts which follow the family data. This was provided by Ko Maung Thaw, student at the University, who worked as my assistant from August through November 1951.

I am indebted to Dr. Htin Aung, Professor of Anthropology and Rector of the University of Rangoon for his constant support and encouragement in this study. I carried out the study as a Fulbright grantee in Anthropology attached to the United States Educational Foundation in Rangoon, to whose officers I am grateful

122 for their cooperation in making the study possible.

● 128 The material is presented here as a collection of field notes from which certain preliminary observations and conclusions may be drawn. A final intensive analysis with the advantages of comparative data must await adequate reference facilities not available at the present time. The notes form part of a collection of Anthropological data on Burmese culture and society being amassed by the Burma Community Research Project under the sponsorship of the Union of Burma Government Mass Education Council.

128 Notes on Presentation:

1. Burmese words are captilized.

2. The spelling of the Burmese words is not truly "phonetical" (which would necessitate the use of an international phonetic alphabet) but is the way the Burmese ordinarily convert their sounds into English spelling. The Burmese phonetic system and true sounds of many of the words given here may be had in William S. Cornyn "Spoken Burmese" 1945-46 (Holt).

3. Wherever meaningful the actual translation of words follow in parenthesis.

4. Space and time measurements and costs are usually given as recorded from the informant in Burmese terms. The glossary gives the western equivalents.

[436] 5. The units of money used are rupees (21 American cents) and annas (1/16th of the rupee) written as in this example: Rs. (rupees) 10/8 with the diagnal line separating the rupees from the annas. When no annas - a dash (-) is used.

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basket PYIDAUNG. Both cost a rupee. One does not seem to be preferred to the other except as getting them allows a bargain to be made. The form is that of a pear shaped body with a square base, measuring about 8 by 8 inches. The basket is constructed in the wicker technique with small, whole reeds. Pathwe: 2. Camp: 1.

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CHIN DAING (storage basket): The form of this basket is a larger version of the measurers. It has, however, an open weave giving a checkered effect to the sides and bottom. It is used to store objects including food. At Pathwe this basket was used in working the INS. The fish were scooped up, and later washed in them. The two used in camp were brought from Pathwe where they cost Rs. 1/4- Camp: 1, Pathwe: 15 for washing fish.

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Winnowing trays: Shallow baskets about 2½ feet in diameter and 2 inches high were used as shifting and storage trays. The SAGAW has a rounded base; whole the SAGAR has a flat base with fiber walls. Both are made of flat, wide-meshed reeds. The trays used in camp came from Pathwe where they cost Rs. 1/4 each. Pathwe: 1.

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THE CHIN (Marketing basket): This basket is in the general shape of a cylinder, 1½ feet wide and 8 inches high, with open, flat reed sides and a semi-circular handle across the top. It is used to carry objects from market and to store them in the house. Pathwe: 2, Camp: 1.

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U Myaing expresses the contrast between the camp equipment and that of Pathwe: "These objects in camp are barely sufficient. We have to live as we are. In our own district we had sufficient to pail in boxes. The extra ones were nailed in boxes and only enough were taken out for the seven people who eat. When visitors come, good ones are brought out. Plates for curry, plates for eating rice. There were various kinds."

Food Items

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Ma Aye Myaing gave as complete a set of data on the food consumption of her family as she could. The following data is inclusive for the family of seven, both in Pantanaw and the refugee camp. Ma Aye Myaing decides what dishes to cook for each meal of the day, and she does this without any consultation with U Myaing. She does not ask him what he would like for each meal, although sometimes when he expresses a desire for a certain dish she sees to it that it is prepared. She has a free hand in deciding what to cook for each meal in the day. Definitions of the weights and measures used follows in a glossary. The data is organized under the headings of (1) Main dishes and raw foods, (2) supplementary dishes and TO-ZAYI (vegetables eaten with HNAPI), and (3) trifles.

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were dropped in favour of cheaper Rangoon products. The new items added to the diet in camp were either similar to those of Pathee or known before. No real innovations were attempted with success.

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SOCIAL AND CEREMONIAL ACTIVITIES

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An attempt will be made under this heading to present some of the major routine activities carried out by U Myaing's family in every day life. Because of the complex nature of the socio-ceremonial activities it will be possible only to outline the more important of these activities. They may be grouped under the headings of (1) activities concerning the family relations, (2) activities relating the family to the community and state and (3) activities relating the family to the supernatural. Wherever possible the Pathee situation will be compared to that of the refugee camp.

Family Relations

Marriage

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U Myaing's account of the initial step in the formation of a family is of some interest. When a couple in love have money, they might marry with a proper ceremony; when they do not, they have to elope. U Myaing eloped with his wife. Some people take this course because the parents are not agreeable to the match. Others feel that it takes too much trouble and time to get married with proper ceremony. Others again elope because they do not like the match made for them by parents. U Myaing and Ma Aye Myaing gave as reason the point that it took too long and too much trouble to get properly married. Also at that time they could not afford to spend a great deal of money.

Some time after elopement there are attempts either on the part of the parents or the elders of the village to effect a reconciliation between the parties concerned. The couple does not usually take the initiative in these proceedings "because the young man is in the position of one who has stolen something from the girl's parents" and consequently has to lie low. The reconciliation takes place through the elders of the village, who approach the parents and request them to take back the young couple. Some couples stay away [redacted] days, some a month, and some a year before rejoining the parental fold. The reconciliation itself is somewhat similar to a wedding ceremony, and

21: Htin Aung E-5 (ca. 1930) 1937 AP1 Burma
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preserved in their entirety except the *Waythandaya*, and even that is extant with only two scenes missing, while respecting the lost scenes themselves some accounts are preserved. His works have been also studied widely and editorial prefaces to his works offer adequate accounts of his life and writings. Moreover, many courtiers of U Pon Nya's time are still living, and from them first-hand accounts have been obtained by scholars of the present day. After all, U Pon Nya's period is very recent.[1]

For the decadent period, 1878 to 1886, I was dependent on oral accounts of the plays until I went to England. Printing came into general use in Burma during this period and very great numbers of plays were printed. From the Government register of published books we learn that as many as three or four editions of 5,000 copies each of the more famous plays of the period were sold out a few weeks after publication. Yet search as I might, I could not find any copies of the plays in Burma. I discovered later that every one of the more famous plays, with about a hundred less-known plays of the period, are happily preserved in the British Museum. Incidentally, I found that the oral accounts regarding them were correct.

References to historical events and to non-dramatic works made in the thesis are taken from standard works.

As regards my dependence on oral tradition, there is this to be said. The oral accounts of a less civilized nation may be more imaginative than accurate, but with the Burmese everything points to the reliability of the tradition. After all, it goes back to only about two hundred years, and the intervening period is not so long as to undermine human memory. Moreover, as I have said, the truth of the tradition can be ascertained from other sources. It should be remembered that in a country where printing was not in general use until about 1860, and records and literary works were written on palm-leaf and parchment, both of which are very liable to destruction by

[1] My chief informants for the period are:

1. Myothawundauk-kadaw, wife of the Myothawundauk, who distinguished himself in the defence of the palace during the Myingun Rebellion mentioned in the chapter on U Pon Nya. She was a lady-in-waiting at court during the last two reigns.

2. My mother's elder brother. My maternal grandfather was Naymyo Thiri Kyawhtin Nawyahta, Minister for Revenue at Minhla, and an 'honorary poet to the court' in the last two reigns.

29: Slater M-4 (no date) 1951 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

In the previous chapters we have tried to discern what Nibbāna means to the Burmese. We now begin to consider its wider significance. We have seen Nibbāna as a consummating, ultimate term in a religion which shapes Burmese life and culture. Yet it is a term which vexes Burmese understanding, a term struggling for expression in a mingling of apparently conflicting affirmations and negations. But it is this very struggle for expression which gives Nibbāna its significance for the study of religion in general. Rightly understood, the problem of Nibbāna is no isolated problem. Its solution concerns the nature of religious expression everywhere. Religion is primarily an affirmation. Why, then, after bold announcement, not only in Buddhism but in other religions too, must the ultimate affirmation be shrouded in mystifying negation? What is the fundamental reference of this negation? To these and similar questions our further study will lead.

It is a study which moves now towards a comparative survey. We shall begin with a reference to the general context of Hīnayāna (Southern) Buddhism. To complete our account of Buddhism, this will be followed by a reference to the Mahāyāna (Northern) context in which Nibbāna as a religious goal is merged with other terms, a development which gives us a stepping stone to the comparative survey of Hindu, Christian and kindred traditions where Nibbāna is no longer the goal.

What we must emphasise at the outset is that the comparison is not between concepts. Neither here, nor in our story of the monk, for example, is it suggested that the *idea* of Nibbāna corresponds to the idea of God or to the idea of Brahman. Our concern throughout is with terms presented by a religious situation, not with philosophical concepts, though the impact of philosophy upon this religious situation cannot, of course, be denied. It is the nature of religious expression which is now our primary interest. All that we have said in the previous chapters concerning the fundamentally religious character of Burmese Buddhism points to this definition of the grounds for comparison.

We turn, then, to a further consideration of the hope of Nibbāna, as it is expressed in the context of Hīnayāna Buddhism, first in the affirmative terms of analogy, secondly in terms of negation.

2. *The Buddhist Affirmation*

As the Goal of religious and moral effort, Nibbāna is clearly an affirmation. Like all religious affirmations, it is the announcement of truth believed to be revealed or discovered. The proclamation of Nibbāna is joined with the proclamation of the Buddha's enlightenment. The Buddha discerned both the Way and the End of the Way.